UN Unveils a Draft Strategy for World Social Gains

WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Attacking Poverty

Building Solidarity

Creating Jobs

Preparations for a major United Nations meeting of world leaders, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, moved forward today with publication of a proposed global strategy for an assault on the intertwined crises of poverty, unemployment and social disintegration.

Saying the "moral fibre of our societies is being eroded" as surely as the natural environment, the draft strategy declares that social progress must become "the major objective of the international community and of each one of us".

At a time of dizzying global change, the draft strategy says, "it is unacceptable" that "individuals and societies with the fewest resources—the poor, the unemployed, the weak and the vulnerable"—should have to bear "the greatest burden of the economic and social transformation of our world".

The two-part text—a Draft Declaration and Draft Programme of Action—offers a first look at what can be expected from the Summit, to be held from 6 to 12 March in Copenhagen, Denmark. The United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has called the meeting an indispensable opportunity for the international community to "elevate the social development agenda to an equal level with economic growth".

Release of the Summit draft documents follows the 25 May presentation of "An Agenda for Development", in which Mr. Boutros-Ghali urges the international community to adopt a compelling new vision of development based on human-centred economic growth, protection of the environment, and societal justice and democracy. Without these, he warns, peace will be forever beyond reach.

The inspiration for the Summit grows out of the General Assembly's determination, in the coming 50th anniversary year of the United Nations, to reaffirm the United Nations Charter goal of promoting "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

The Copenhagen Summit, the draft text notes, "is not an isolated event". It will build on the commitments of a whole constellation of other United Nations conferences, including history's largest diplomatic gathering, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the so-called Earth Summit.

"To reduce social inequalities and to achieve sustainable development is a measure of our solidarity as individuals, members of society and of the international community", the Draft Programme of Action declares.

The Summit draft documents reflect discussions among more than 150 Member States at the first substantive session of the Summit Preparatory Committee, which was held in New York from 31 January to 11 February 1994.

A Moral Obligation

The documents, prepared by the Summit secretariat at the request of the Preparatory Committee, will be taken up by the Committee at its second substantive meeting, from 22 August to 2 September in New York. A third and final preparatory meeting is scheduled in New York from 16 to 27 January 1995.

"We proclaim that social progress is, in effect, possible", the Summit Draft Declaration says. But it warns that solutions must be identified—and collective will mustered—to deal with the three core problems at the heart of the Summit's agenda: extreme poverty; unemployment and underemployment; and the question of how a diversity of nations—and people within nations—can learn to live together in harmony.

With more than a billion desperately impoverished people, and with women bearing a disproportionate share of the suffering, "the struggle against poverty constitutes a moral obligation to ensure that all human beings enjoy at least the basic food, shelter, social services and human relationships that are necessary

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for health, dignity and social participation", the Draft Programme of Action declares.

The Draft Declaration calls for the elimination of "all forms of discrimination which mutilate our societies", and for "the elimination of extreme forms of poverty, with precise targets at the national level". It also proclaims "the value of human labour" and "our will to make every possible effort to enable every man and woman who so desires to hold a paying job".

A basic premise of the draft strategy is that "unequal access to resources, technology and knowledge has created unequal growth and led to increasing socio-economic inequality, both within and among nations".

An Enabling Environment

An essential first step in alleviating this situation, according to the draft text, will be to create an "enabling environment" in which global solutions are feasible.

A favourable economic environment, the Draft Programme of Action suggests, could grow out of efforts to assist developing countries, such as reducing trade barriers and debt, and re-examining the social conseqences of structural readjustment programmes.

A favorable political environment could emerge from United Nations–led efforts to reduce tensions and violence, and to encourage Governments to redirect resources into development that are now used for military purposes.

Effective universal forums will be required as well—including new uses for the General Assembly, whose agenda, according to the Draft Programme of Action, should be restructured "to facilitate the systematic, integrated discussion of the implications of emerging global changes on human well-being and to set priorities and direction for national policies and international action".

While "there are no simple solutions to poverty", the text says, national and international actions must be aimed at "making economic and social policies sensitive to the interests of the poor", and by integrating "specific anti-poverty policies and programmes in the framework of development policy".

A vital component in a global war on poverty, according to the Draft Programme of Action, should be the creation not only of jobs for all, but of productive, worthwhile employment that will allow people to lift themselves and their families out of impoverishment.

Poverty's link with the issue of productive employment is starkly apparent, the text notes, in the fact that the working poor constitute the largest share of the 1.1 billion absolute poor people in the world.

With more than 120 million people without jobs worldwide and an estimated 700 million underemployed, the text says, it is clear that employment "is a key, if not the primary factor, in the achievement of higher living standards".

A Productive Diversity

Yet none of this, the Draft Programme of Action declares, will be possible without creating an environment in which different groups can live together—not by eliminating differences, but "in productive and cooperative diversity" both "within our national borders and in the wider setting of the 'global village'".

Towards this end, an important goal must be to protect "the integrity of indigenous and tribal cultures and ways of life", as well as "ending discrimination in all its forms"; "promoting equal opportunity"; "using education as an integrating force"; and "bringing government closer to the people".

The overall goal of the Summit, the Draft Declaration says, will be to identify ways in which the international community and individuals everywhere can enhance the dignity of each human being, develop the material and spiritual well-being of every community and build solidarity among groups and nations.

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